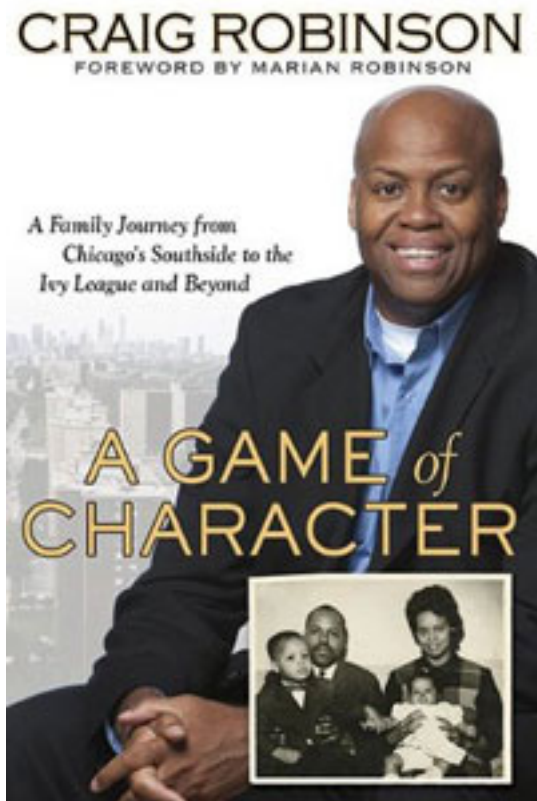


## Fraternizing with the First Brother-in-Law

Written by with Kam Williams

---



### Craig Robinson. - The “A Game of Character” Interview

Craig Robinson was born in Chicago on April 21, 1962, to Fraser and Marian Robinson and raised in a modest home where he had to share a room with his younger sister, Michelle. With help of devoted parents, who made major sacrifices on their behalf, both children were inspired to excel academically and were admitted to Princeton University.

6’6” Craig was also a basketball phenom who was twice voted the Ivy League Player of the Year during his college tenure. This meant that Michelle grew up in the shadow of her protective big brother. But today, those roles are reversed with Craig in the shadow of his world famous sibling, since she’s now the First Lady of the United States.

After playing basketball professionally in Europe, he earned an MBA from the University of Chicago, and entered the world of finance where he enjoyed a meteoric rise until another dream beckoned, namely, to coaching. Craig spent two years as the head coach at Brown, where he spearheaded a revival of the school’s flagging program, winning more games in his first two years than any other head coach in the school’s basketball history before being named the Ivy League Basketball Coach of the Year.

Currently, Craig, his kids and wife, Kelly, live in Oregon where he coaches Oregon State University’s men’s basketball team. Here, he discusses his autobiography, “*A Game of Character*,” and reflects about his career and about how his life has changed since his brother-in-law, Barack, became President.

## Fraternizing with the First Brother-in-Law

Written by with Kam Williams

---

**Kam Williams:** Hey, thanks for the time. Much appreciated.

**Craig Robinson:** Oh, my pleasure, man. Thank you for reading my book.

**KW:** I really enjoyed it. How should I refer to you, as the First Brother-in-Law?

**CR:** [Laughs] You can call me Craig, Coach, or whatever you like.

**KW:** How does it feel, as a two-time Ivy League Player of the Year, to find yourself suddenly overshadowed by your sister for the first time?

**CR:** It's ironic, but it's kind of fun for me. As I mentioned in the book, for most of her life, until just a few years ago, she was always known as Craig Robinson's little sister. It's much more fun being Michelle Obama's big brother.

**KW:** In reading the book, you emphasized the importance of both family and basketball in shaping your character. Which would you say played a bigger role?

**CR:** I'd say the split is really about 70% family, 30% basketball. The foundation I learned from my parents. It just so happened that my father was into athletics, so he often used sports to reiterate some of the lessons he had already taught me at home.

**KW:** Children's book author Irene Smalls' asks, "How does it feel to be the First Lady's brother?" And, "Seeing politics up close and personal, do you have political aspirations of your own?"

**CR:** I'll answer the second question first. I don't have any political aspirations. I so much enjoy coaching. I feel so rewarded having the opportunity to help shape the lives of young people. As to how it feels to be the First Lady's brother, it's really been an eye-opener for me to work on the Presidential campaign, and to get an insider's view of Washington and politics. It was humbling and quite an honor to be able to go around the country and talk about my family. And to see the inner workings of the White House, just from my own inquisitive point of view, has been really interesting. It's been almost all positive.

**KW:** What did you think of the issue of the New Yorker Magazine that came out during the campaign with the cover suggesting that your sister and Barack were terrorists?

[http://bittenandbound.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/obama\\_new\\_yorker\\_cover\\_01\\_wenn5164032.jpg](http://bittenandbound.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/obama_new_yorker_cover_01_wenn5164032.jpg)

**CR:** It didn't bother me, because I knew who my sister and brother-in-law were. While it might have been disturbing to some people, it really didn't upset me. Whenever trailblazers are trying to break through a ceiling into uncharted territory, they have to be prepared for pushback and challenges, and for it not be pretty.

**KW:** Have you ever read the book, "The Rage of a Privileged Class," by Ellis Cose? <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060925949?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0060925949>

He's also from Chicago. The book talks about the frustrations encountered by many black professionals upon entering the corporate world. I know plenty of folks like the ones he describes whose careers never fully flourished despite impressive credentials and their showing dedication. Why do you think you, your sister and President Obama have fared so differently?

**CR:** I haven't read the book, but I'm going to run out and try to find it. I certainly understand the

## Fraternizing with the First Brother-in-Law

Written by with Kam Williams

---

point it sounds like he's making. Having worked in corporate America, the only thing I can say is that growing up in our house Michelle and I were taught to do our best, to be content with that, and not to gauge our success by how much money we made. And we saw that ethic demonstrated every day, watching our father getting up and going to work, despite his being disabled, and my mom working so hard, too. My parents' prevailing mantra was self-confidence. They taught us not to let anybody else define us, and to not worry about what other people thought. What that does is instill the confidence and determination that you need to compete when things are so much against you.

**KW:** It makes me think of PBS anchorwoman Gwen Ifill's memoir, where she recounted being greeted on the first day of work at a Boston newspaper by a note on her desk which read, "[N-word] go home!"

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0767928903?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0767928903> Luckily, she wasn't crushed by the insult like the racist undoubtedly hoped. The incident only served to strengthen her resolve. But not everybody is blessed with the combination of intelligence, grace and intestinal fortitude needed to survive and even flourish in a toxic environments like that.

**CR:** You have to have the type of personality that doesn't care about that sort of intimidation. It helps to feel in every fiber of your being that, "I'm here to do something that I'd love to do. And if you think this is going to scare me away, then you don't know who I am."

**KW:** Attorney Bernadette Beekman asks, "How has the family dynamic changed since your mother and sister moved to the White House?" Also, "Are all family events now at your sister's?"

**CR:** No, all family events are not at my sister's, although things obviously have changed a little. Now, it's a bit of a logistical nightmare to get together, but I still talk to my mother and sister at least once a week. And the things we speak about haven't changed. It's family stuff: parenting, the kids, and how they're doing.

**KW:** I forgot that you and your wife just had a baby. Congratulations!

**CR:** Yep, in January, thank you.

**KW:** Are you getting any sleep?

**CR:** No, but I'm at the point where I don't need a lot of sleep.

**KW:** Bernadette has a couple of follow-ups. "Do you have Secret Service following you around all the time?" And, "How often each week do people reach out to you just to get to Barack?"

**CR:** I can't comment about our security. As for the second question, people reach out to me incessantly to get through to Barack. Because I'm a coach, my contact information is easily accessible, and people write, call and send things to me constantly.

**KW:** Hot Rod Williams wants to know, who was best player you ever played against? Having read the book, I'd guess your answer is gonna be Michael Jordan.

**CR:** Right. That was in a summer league game.

**KW:** He also wants to know, what was your greatest basketball moment as a player?

**CR:** The NCAA Tournament my senior year, when we won two games, including an upset of

## Fraternizing with the First Brother-in-Law

Written by with Kam Williams

---

Oklahoma State, is my fondest memory from my playing days..

**KW:** FSU grad Laz Lyles would like to know your thoughts about the Gulf oil spill.

**CR:** Well, my thoughts are that this is an awful tragedy that sounds like it could have been avoided. My heart just goes out to the families of the people who lost their lives, and to the people of the Gulf who are going to feel the effects of it for years to come.

**KW:** Yale grad Tommy Russell wants to know if you think your brother-in-law is doing enough in response to the crisis in the Gulf.

**CR:** That's a loaded question that I'd prefer not to answer.

**KW:** Tommy also asks, when you visit the White House, do you stay over? And if so, in what room?

**CR:** I've only spent the night there once, and I stayed in the Lincoln bedroom. I imagine I would stay there any time I'm invited, because it's got the biggest bed.

**KW:** Reverend Florine Thompson says, "I read that your mother refers to you as Philosopher-in-Chief. This being the case, what is the wisest quote that you are known for in the family?"

**CR:** [LOL] I don't know that I've been quoted yet.

**KW:** She also asks, when life seems most challenging, who gets you through those difficult times?

**CR:** I would have to say my family, specifically, my wife, my mom and my kids.

**KW:** Another one from Reverend Thompson: What leadership/management style do you commit to and why?

**CR:** As a coach, it involves a lot more teaching and instructing than it did when I was in the business world. I try to get my players to do things that they wouldn't be able to do on their own.

**KW:** Her follow-up is, "What is your primary goal as coach of the Oregon State Beavers?"

**CR:** The primary goal is to compete for the national championship. That's the ultimate goal. But I'd say that right now we're just trying to compete for the Pac-10 championship every year.

**KW:** Is recruiting easier or harder, being the First Brother-in-Law?

**CR:** We're still trying to figure that out, but being related to the President and First Lady of the United States certainly gives me some brand awareness.

**KW:** Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

**CR:** No, although every now and then I get a question I've never been asked before. This is the first time I've ever been interviewed where the reporter has had questions from readers. That's different.

**KW:** The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

**CR:** For my life, probably not. I haven't been afraid in a long time. But I'm definitely a worrier.

## Fraternizing with the First Brother-in-Law

Written by with Kam Williams

---

**KW:** The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

**CR:** Yes.

**KW:** The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

**CR:** This weekend.

**KW:** The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

**CR:** John Adams by David McCullough. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/141657588X?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=141657588X>

**KW:** The music maven Heather Covington question: What are you listening to on your iPod?

**CR:** I listen to a little bit of everything: hip-hop, R&B, reggae and jazz. And I'll even tune-in to a Top-40 station on the radio.

**KW:** When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

**CR:** When I look in the mirror, I hope I'm doing the right thing. I see someone who's trying to do his best to leave a mark which helps rather than hurts people.

**KW:** Guess what? Just this second I got an email marked "URGENT!" warning me not to open any email with the subject heading "Blacks in the White House," because it might be a virus.

**CR:** [Chuckles] That's ironic, huh?

**KW:** Yeah, but I'm sure it's not true. They never are. The Ling-Ju Yen question: What is your earliest childhood memory?

**CR:** Oh, man, it was when I was 3, before we moved out of our first apartment. I remember my mom holding me up to the window so I could see my dad coming home from work.

**KW:** What was it like sharing a room with Michelle as a child?

**CR:** It was a lot of fun. We were very close. My parents never pitted us against each other, so it was a really easygoing childhood. Because she became First Lady, people want me to say that I predicted it back then. But I didn't.

**KW:** What is your favorite dish to cook?

**CR:** Fried chicken.

**KW:** If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

**CR:** That my dad could have lived to see all the stuff that's going on for us right now.

**KW:** The Uduak Oduok question: Who is your favorite clothes designer?

**CR:** I don't have one. Being 6'6" and 260 pounds, I like any designers who can make clothes look good on me.

**KW:** What is your guiltiest pleasure?

**CR:** Krispy Kreme donuts. They're a real test of willpower.

## Fraternizing with the First Brother-in-Law

Written by with Kam Williams

---

**CR:** Do you ever wish you could get your anonymity back?

**KW:** [Laughs] Yeah, sometimes, for my daughter's sake. When we go out to dinner, she would love to make sure we share some quality time together. But sometimes, that's just not possible, between my being a basketball coach, and my sister being the First Lady.

**KW:** How do you want to be remembered?

**CR:** As somebody who gave more than he took.

**KW:** Thanks again, Craig, good luck in the Pac-10 next season, and give my best to your sister and brother-in-law.

**CR:** Alright, man, I appreciate it. This was fun.

To order a copy of A Game of Character, visit:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1592405487?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=1592405487>